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Republic of Rwanda

Head of state: Paul Kagame

Head of government: Anastase Murekezi (replaced Pierre Damien Habumuremyi in July)

Freedoms of expression and association in Rwanda continued to be unduly restricted by the authorities. Rwandans were unable to openly express critical views on issues perceived as sensitive by the authorities and the environment for journalists, human rights defenders and members of the opposition remained repressive. There were reports of unlawful detention by Rwandan military intelligence and past cases of torture were not investigated.

Background

2014 marked the 20th anniversary of the 1994 genocide in which around 800,000 Rwandan Tutsi and Hutu opposed to the government were killed. Around the world, events held to remember the victims reiterated the need for the international community to continue to improve its response to emerging mass atrocities.¹

Economic progress and development continued. However, the political landscape continued to be dominated by the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) without any meaningful opposition. The authorities continued to react harshly to any criticism, especially regarding its human rights record.

In late July, President Kagame reshuffled the cabinet and Prime Minister Habumuremyi was replaced. The President of the Senate, Jean-Damascène Ntawukuriryayo, resigned in September.

In June, a report by the UN Group of Experts noted that the fate of former combatants and political cadres of the March 23 Movement (M23) armed group remained unresolved, including escapes of individuals from camps in Rwanda. Many M23 members had fled to Rwanda following their defeat by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) troops in late 2013.

Political assassinations abroad

The Rwandan government denied allegations that they were linked to successful or attempted assassinations of political dissidents abroad.

On 1 January, Patrick Karegeya, a leading member of the opposition Rwandan National Congress (RNC) and former Head of External Intelligence (RDF), was found dead in a hotel room in Johannesburg, South Africa. Investigations into his killing were carried out; however, the perpetrators

were not identified. Public statements following his death by the Rwandan authorities, including President Kagame, sought to justify the killing of people who were traitors to the country.

In August, a South African Court found four men guilty of the 2010 attempted assassination of Kayumba Nyamwasa, an exiled RNC dissident and former Chief of Staff of the RDF. The judge was cited in media reports as saying that the main culprits for the attempted assassination remained at large.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders were subjected to personalized attacks and threats and faced intimidation and administrative obstacles. Space for criticism of the country's human rights record by civil society was almost non-existent. The human rights community remained weakened, with individuals taking a pro-government position in their work or employing self-censorship to avoid harassment by the authorities.

In August, Transparency International (TI) issued a statement reporting security risks experienced by its staff. According to TI, an armed man had attempted to enter its offices on 29 July and another staff member had reported security threats at his home. The killing in July 2013 of Gustave Makonene, who worked for TI, had a chilling effect on other activists working on potentially sensitive issues, such as corruption.

On 8 August, the High Court of Nyarugenge in Kigali ruled that the current executive committee of the Rwandan League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LIPRODHOR) should remain in place. The complaint had been brought by the former President of LIPRODHOR who had been ousted in July 2013 in a move supported by the Rwanda Governance Board, an official body charged with promoting and monitoring good governance in Rwanda. The complainant lodged an appeal against the judgment.

Political prisoners

Following the rejection of her appeal in December 2013, Victoire Ingabire, President of the United Democratic Forces party (FDU-Inkingi), remained in Kigali Central Prison serving a 15-year prison sentence for terrorism-related and freedom of expression offences. Some of the evidence used to convict her was linked to the legitimate expression of her ideas. Victoire Ingabire had returned to Rwanda in January 2010 after 16 years in exile in Europe.

Bernard Ntaganda, President of the Ideal Social Party (Parti Social-Imberakuri), was released from Mpanga prison after four years in detention. He had been found guilty in 2011 of "divisionism" for making public speeches criticizing government policies ahead of the 2010 elections, breaching state security and attempting to plan an "unauthorized demonstration".

Freedoms of association and expression

People continued to be imprisoned for the legitimate exercise of their rights to freedom of association or of expression.

Sylvain Sibomana and Anselme Mutuyimana, members of FDU-Inkingi, remained in prison. Both were sentenced in January following their conviction for inciting insurrection or trouble among the population after organizing a meeting in Rutsiro district in September 2012. An appeal was lodged against the convictions. Six members of FDU-Inkingi were released on 5 September after serving a two-year sentence for attending the same meeting in Rutsiro. Sylvain Sibomana was also convicted of participating in illegal gatherings for taking part in a demonstration outside the Supreme Court during Victoire Ingabire's appeal in March 2013.

Political parties

The few opposition parties permitted faced a repressive environment. Legal procedures for establishing political parties remained lengthy and time-consuming.

The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (DGPR), which had been granted official registration in August 2013, called for an investigation to establish the whereabouts of a leading party member, Jean Damascène Munyeshyaka, who was last seen on 27 June 2014 in Nyamata, Bugesera District. The DGPR alleged that prior to his disappearance he had received a telephone call from an individual requesting that they meet immediately. The DGPR had previously reported administrative obstacles in registering and state surveillance, harassment and intimidation because of their political activities.

Unlawful detentions by the military

Reports of unlawful detentions by the RDF continued. People were held in detention centres that were not part of the Rwanda Correctional Service, without access to lawyers or due process.

Past allegations of torture, including beatings, electric shocks and sensory deprivation, were not investigated.

The authorities rejected criticism of alleged unlawful detentions by military intelligence made by the US and UK governments. On 4 June 2014, President Kagame responded to recent reports by saying that those seeking to destabilize the country would be arrested or even killed.

Unfair trials – state security trials

High-ranking military officers were held on state security charges. The authorities failed to respect due process in their treatment of people suspected of terrorism-related offences.

The trial of Joel Mutabazi and 15 others ended in October. Joel Mutabazi, a former bodyguard to President Kagame, was convicted of plotting attacks against the government and sentenced to life imprisonment. He announced his intention to appeal the verdict. Many of his co-accused stated in court that they had been tortured and forced to make confessions. However, the court failed to investigate these allegations. Joel Mutabazi had been detained incommunicado by Rwanda's Department of Military Intelligence at Camp Kami for several months in 2010 and 2011 and tortured. He had fled to Uganda, where he was under the protection of the Ugandan authorities, but in October 2013 he was abducted and illegally returned to Rwanda.

Four people – Kizito Mihigo, a singer; Cassien Ntamuhanga, a journalist with Amazing Grace Radio; Jean Paul Dukuzumuremyi, a demobilized soldier; and Agnes Nyibizi, an accountant – were arrested in April and charged with state security offences. Official reports indicated they were accused of having been recruited by the RNC and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, an armed group based in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and of planning terrorist activities. It was reported that Kizito Mihigo may have held critical conversations by email with the opposition abroad; however, this remained unconfirmed. The four were detained pending trial at the end of the year.

In August, Rwandan military intelligence arrested four individuals linked to the RDF. They faced charges including tarnishing the image of the country or government, inciting insurrection or trouble among the population, concealing objects which were used or meant to commit an offence, and illegal possession of firearms. Three faced trials before a military court – Colonel Tom Byabagamba, retired General Frank Rusagara and Sergeant François Kabayiza. Captain David Kabuye was due to be tried before a civilian court. All four trials were pending at the end of 2014.

Prisoners of conscience

In June, Agnès Nkusi Uwimana, editor of the private Kinyarwanda-language newspaper Umurabyo, was released after completing a four-year prison sentence. She had been imprisoned for threatening state security after writing opinion pieces critical of government policies and alleged corruption in the run-up to the 2010 presidential elections.

International justice

Trials of people suspected of involvement in the Rwandan genocide continued in national courts outside Rwanda.

On 18 February, former Mayor Onesphore Rwabukombe was found guilty of aiding and abetting

genocide and was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment by a German court.

On 14 March, a former Rwandan army captain, Pascal Simbikangwa, was found guilty by a French court of complicity in genocide and crimes against humanity. The court found that he played a key role in drawing up lists of Tutsi and moderate Hutu leaders to be targeted and contributed to the setting up of Radio Mille Collines, which broadcast messages inciting violence. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison. It was the first time a French court had tried a genocide suspect. Six other genocide suspects in France were awaiting trial or on trial at the end of the year.

On 7 May, the Quebec Superior Court upheld Désiré Munyaneza's conviction by a Canadian court for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

On 19 June, a Swedish court confirmed the sentence of life imprisonment for Stanislas Mbanenande for his role in five massacres in Kibuye during the genocide.

Extradition trials of four genocide suspects in the UK continued during the year.

In April, a Norwegian court sentenced Sadi Bugingo to 21 years' imprisonment for his role in the genocide. His appeal was pending at the end of the year. The request to the Norwegian authorities for the extradition of another genocide suspect was approved, but pending appeal at the end of the year.

In the Netherlands, the extraditions of two men were pending at the end of the year and in Denmark another genocide suspect was awaiting trial.

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda prepared to close down its operations. It had one case pending appeal at the end of 2014. The tribunal had completed 75 cases, 14 of which ended in acquittals and 10 were transferred to national jurisdictions.